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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002229

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SUBJECT: MOLDOVAN PRESIDENT VORONIN CALLS ON MEDVEDEV

Classified By: Acting M/C for Political Affairs David Kostelancik for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The MFA downplayed Moscow's role in Moldova's coalition talks, saying Moldovan President Voronin's August 21 meeting with President Medvedev in Sochi was motivated instead by the upcoming CIS summit. Liberal-Democratic leader Filat's positions on NATO and the CIS do not worry Moscow, as they were intended solely for political consumption, and Moscow will respect the will of the Moldovan people. Despite talk of a "5 plus 2" round in September, there will be no movement on Transnistria until the new government in Chisinau is formed; likewise, the visit produced no resolution on the USD 500 million loan, currently in the hands of the Ministry of Finance. However, analysts see more discontent in Moscow over the recent developments in Moldova than the MFA let on. End Summary.

Coalition talks

¶2. (C) In an August 26 meeting, MFA 2nd CIS 1st Secretary Dmitriy Groshev disagreed with the notion that Moldovan President Voronin's main reason to meet with President Medvedev in Sochi August 21 was to discuss ongoing coalition talks in Moldova. In particular, there could be no link between Voronin's visit and the Moldovan Communist Party's subsequent reversal of its negotiating position, now declining to participate in coalition talks with the Alliance for European Integration parties. Moscow considered the coalition talks Moldova's internal affair, Groshev asserted, although Medvedev had certainly been interested to hear Voronin's report on the latest developments on the subject.

NATO

¶3. (C) Groshev was not concerned about Liberal-Democratic Party leader Filat's announcement that Moldova under a new leadership would seek NATO membership. While noting that a new ruling coalition had yet to be formed, and that Moldova's constitution enshrined that country's neutrality, Groshev nonetheless said that Russia would accept the Moldovan population's vote for NATO, if it were to happen.

CIS

¶4. (C) The main purpose of Voronin's visit, according to Groshev, was to discuss preparations for the upcoming CIS summit, at which time Moldova will pass the CIS presidency to Russia. It made sense for Voronin to raise the summit issue,

Groshev said, as there was a "high probability" Voronin would still be in power at the time of the October summit. Groshev dismissed comments by Filat that the CIS was a "stillborn organization," calling it "just a political re-statement" of one of his party's platform planks. Groshev saw no risk that Moldova might actually leave the CIS, nonetheless conceding the Commonwealth's decreased importance as a "forum for discussion." Actual cooperation in the post-Soviet space is taking place bilaterally.

Transnistria

15. (C) Medvedev and Voronin only briefly touched upon Transnistria matters, Groshev said, given that the conflict resolution process was practically suspended due to Moldova's domestic political . He had no comment on the possibility of "5 plus 2" talks in September. Groshev noted that the personal antipathy between Voronin and Transnistrian leader Smirnov had been a complicating factor so far, and suggested that the problems their dislike caused for Medvedev while organizing the March 18, 2009 "2 plus 1" talks between Voronin, Smirnov, and Medvedev would make Medvedev wary of offering a similar new round anytime soon. However, given Moldova would soon have a new leader, and that the recent resignation of parliamentary speaker Yevgeniy Shevchuk showed Transnistria was no longer united behind Smirnov, the prospects for settlement might improve in the near future, Groshev wagered.

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16. (SBU) Before Voronin's visit, Itar-Tass August 21 quoted an unnamed Kremlin official accusing Moldova and the West of presenting Russia as "a party to the conflict," blaming Russia for the lack of progress in resolving the conflict, and for supporting Transnistrian separatism. Instead, Russia was responsible for maintaining stability in the region, acting as a "guarantor and mediator" in the negotiations.

Loan

17. (C) Newspaper reports that Russia's USD 500 million loan to Moldova is "on hold" until a new government is in place in Chisinau were untrue, Groshev said. The loan resolution, which he had not seen, was at the Russian Ministry of Finance for negotiation. Initially meant to stabilize Chisinau's budget, it was now meant to fund specific investment projects, he said.

Pundits

18. (SBU) Analysts see more discontent in Moscow over the recent developments in Moldova. Tatyana Stanovaya in politcom.ru called Filat's comments on the CIS and NATO a sign that Moldova would soon choose between "pro-Russia and pro-Western vectors," but conceded that no Moldovan government could allow itself to get on Moscow's bad side. Svetlana Gamova in Nezavisimaya Gazeta said the prospect of Moldovan NATO membership would "shake Moscow's position in the region," while noting Filat's disdain of the CIS, an organization Russia dominates. She asserted that Voronin had come to Sochi to consult with Medvedev about the Chisinau coalition talks. Igor Glanin, however, surmised in Vremya Novostey that economic problems would keep any new Moldovan government from pursuing NATO ambitions, and noted Russia's importance both as a trade partner for Moldova, and as the source of USD 1 billion in remittances sent home yearly by Moldovan seasonal workers in Russia.

Comment

¶9. (C) Despite MFA assurances to the contrary, it is hard not to link Voronin's Sochi visit to the Moldovan Communists' position in the coalition talks, particularly the decision to boycott coalition talks with the Alliance for European Integration parties, whose anti-CIS and pro-NATO statements are unacceptable to Russian ears.
Beyrle